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War Food Administration
Nutrition Programs Branch
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Case History
of a
Nutrition Committee Activity

A COUNTY COMMITTEE DEMONSTRATES HOW TO MAKE

FOOD FIGHT FOR FREEDOM. 1/

The Ohio Nutrition Committee, organized in November 1940, was recognized as the official war service committee on nutrition for the Ohio State Council of Defense soon after the organization of that Council in 1942. While it worked on problems brought to it by the council, the committee preserved its identity and the right to develop a program of work on its own initiative.

To meet the need of county nutrition committees for counseling and inspiration, a consultant service was developed in the spring of 1943. Twenty-one consultants now serve 85 county committees. The consultants, field workers of the various agencies represented on the state committee, are drawn from the Department of Health, Office of Distribution, Department of Education, Agricultural Extension Service, Farm Security Administration, and Welfare Department. A state training meeting was held for the consultants at the time of their appointment and a manual developed for their use and additional training given as needed.

Plans for the 1944 Food Fights for Freedom Program in Ohio were made in the fall of 1943 with nutrition committees spearheading the program and working with the Councils of Defense and O. P. A. Through the state committee, it was recommended that the food demonstration was a method which could be used to assist in acquainting people with nutrition information needed to meet the situation during wartime.

MAHONING COUNTY CHOSEN AS "DEMONSTRATION" COUNTY

To set a pattern which could be used by other communities in Ohio with similar population and agency groups. Mahoning County (Youngstown) was selected as the "demonstration" county for war food demonstrations in Ohio.

Mahoning County is located on the eastern boundary of Ohio. It was settled by the Yankees from New England and the Dutch from Pennsylvania who came to this part of Ohio because of their desire for new and better farms. The rich mineral resources of the area, however, turned it into an industrial community soon after it was settled.

A concentration of population always follows industrial development. Mahoning County and Youngstown were no exception. In 1800 the two communities of Youngstown and Poland numbered their population in hundreds; by 1860 their population had grown to 26,000. In 1940, the population of Youngstown alone was about 170,000. In 1939, the iron and steel industry in Youngstown produced \$140,000,000 worth of products which represented 74 per cent of all manufacturing in the city.

1/ Adapted from material prepared by Irene Wolgamot, Executive Secretary, Ohio Nutrition Committee.

Steel has also determined the racial characteristics of Youngstown - the total per cent of foreign birth extraction is 54 per cent as compared with 30 per cent for the State. Of the foreign birth groups Slovaks and Slovenians are the most numerous, with Poles and Italians next. So dominant is heavy industry in this section that this 25-mile stretch of steel mills along the Mahoning River Valley in Northeastern Ohio, has been called the 'Ruhr Valley of America' with Youngstown the heart. When war came, more smoke than ever poured from the stacks of Youngstown's factories, and in fact all the factories over Ohio.

The Youngstown - Mahoning Nutrition Council was selected as the "demonstration" county because of its interest and progressiveness and because it was a metropolitan community, highly industrial and with a large foreign population. Moreover, the council represented a very wide cross section of all agencies and groups active in the civic welfare of the community. Represented on the council were the Mahoning County Medical association; the Agricultural Extension Service; the American Red Cross; the City Board of Health; the County Board of Health; the Dairy Council; the Public School Cafeterias; the Visiting Nurses' Association; Farm Security Administration; Parent Teachers Association; Federation of Women's Clubs; International Institute; Inter-Racial Committee; Victory Garden Council; Hospital Dietitians; Industrial Nurses; Public Schools Home Economics Department; Board of Education's Extended School Services, and the Office of Civilian Defense.

Preparing for Action

The executive sub-committee of the County Council made plans for this program at meetings held regularly once a week during the early fall of 1943. Then once a month the entire Council met with the executive sub-committee for a presentation of plans, progress reports from the various agencies, and to give the sub-committee suggestions for the coming month. After the plans were well under way the executive sub-committee held its meeting only twice a month instead of every week. Participants in the program felt, however, that is was the interest and enthusiasm stimulated and sustained by these frequent meetings that enabled them to formulate effective, detailed plans so necessary to an action program to be carried out by a group.

The State Nutrition Committee prepared the bulletin - "Guide for War Food Demonstrations." The Committee also planned for the assistance of demonstrators who could give refresher training on demonstrating to county groups of home economists.

The Executive Secretary assisted in organizing and planning the program and also in preparing materials for the refresher meeting.

The consultant (in this case, the Nutritionist with the State Health Department) conducted a refresher course sponsored by the County Nutrition Council on 4 consecutive evenings. War food demonstrators were recruited from the group who attended the course.

The County Council after planning the program, sponsoring the refresher course and recruiting the demonstrators, gave demonstrations each month with a "refresher" meeting for the war food demonstrators on the first Thursday evening of each month.

The program of the first half of 1944 covered: January, Meats and Meat extenders; February, the Packed Lunch; March, Soybeans and Soybean Products; April, Vegetables; and May, Food Preservation. The subject-of-the-month plan was so successful that, following a program which emphasized all the phases of food preservation during the summer months, war food demonstrations on a different food each month were resumed again for the fall.

For the public demonstrations, "highlights: on the subject-of-the-month, mimeographed by the Defense Council, were distributed. These "highlights" were also taken home regularly by the home economics students of the Youngstown schools. They were distributed to members of the federated women's clubs. P.T.A. groups, rural groups, and to persons who visited day care centers, mother's clinics, and to other groups.

Various Methods Used to Reach the Public

Newspaper space and talks over the radio were used extensively to reach people who might not belong to some of the groups attending the demonstrations and to stimulate the attention of the general public.

The window of a bank on the public square of Youngstown was donated to the council and put to good use throughout the summer. Displays and exhibits, changed each month, were shown on Soybeans and Soya Products, and the various phases of canning and drying.

Six copies of the film strip, "Food Fights for Freedom," were used over the county. The educational film strip "Mess Improvement" and the film, "Canning the Victory Crop," were shown to various groups.

Pupils from one of Youngstown's schools presented the nutrition skit, "So They Say" at the N. E. Ohio P. T. A. conference at Youngstown in the spring of 1944. The play, (or film) "Food Makes History" was used in the schools to stimulate concerted interest in the role of food in wartime among the school children.

Copies of the National Wartime Food Guide, Food Quiz, You Can Shorten the War With Food, Home Canning of Fruits and Vegetables, and Take Care of Your Pressure Cooker, were widely distributed. Special recipe leaflets from the Bureau of Human Nutrition and Home Economics, Department of Agriculture, on the use of foods in abundance were distributed upon request.

Nutrition charts and posters, from the Office of Distribution were used in schools, restaurants and other public buildings to focus the attention of the general public on the right use of food for good nutrition

Low income groups were reached through organizations and agencies which come in contact with them by talks, demonstrations, and the distribution of simple materials.

In the low income areas of Youngstown some families were reached through child care centers and P. T. A. groups. Others were reached through their children in the schools. Low-income families in the rural areas were reached

chiefly through Farm Security Administration and the Extension Service. Nurses and dietitians in the war plants reached many low-income industrial workers with nutrition information. The "V" specials in the school lunch rooms reached many children from low-income families.

To reach foreign groups with nutrition information, the Nutrition Council worked through the Director of the International Institute. Representatives of the various foreign groups were invited to attend the "refresher" demonstration meetings. The outstanding representatives from the foreign groups were then invited to give a demonstration which would appeal to the women of their nationality groups.

For example, at a refresher meeting for War Food demonstrators an Italian woman showed how to pack a lunch box to appeal to the food likes of her people and provide good nutrition. A Slovakian woman prepared a similar lunch box which would appeal to the food likes of her nationality group. These women were then encouraged to repeat the demonstration to their own groups. Nationality groups were also reached through the Red Cross nutrition classes, day care centers, P. T. A., and other groups.

In addition to reaching industrial workers through all groups the industrial nurse of the Carnegie Steel Corporation conducted a half hour discussion with movies as a part of the induction training of all new women workers. While this is rather a small amount of time, the workers are requesting that more time be devoted to nutrition.

Food and Nutrition demonstrations and talks were given at mother's clinics and mother's groups of the Visiting Nurses Association Mothers; children and staff members in Child Care Centers; Public School students of Home Economics and their Mothers; P. T. A. groups; Federated Club groups; 4-H Clubs; Granges; Church groups; F. S. A. families; Foreign Women's groups; International Institute; Public School Cafeterias; School Demonstrations; Pittsburgh Dairy Council; Pre-induction classes for newly employed women at the Carnegie Steel plant; International Institute Clubs; Youngstown Metropolitan Housing Area; Baby Welfare Clinics; Christ Mission; Franklin Settlement, and Nielson House.

EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROGRAM

The County Nutrition Council says. "The effectiveness of the program is difficult to answer, but nutrition is mentioned more often by others at different group meetings." The council has sponsored 150 events, which reached directly 12,000 people. They have distributed 23,000 pieces of literature. They have reached many people with newspaper articles, radio talks and exhibits. While these numbers indicate only exposure to information, the fact that people are asking council members more questions on food and nutrition, are writing for more information and are eager to tell others of the work done, shows further interest. Some groups as blind and old-age pensioners and soldier's wives have asked for help in budgeting their incomes and making food plans. Some "white-collar families" whose incomes have not increased with the cost of living have requested help. People in various groups have also requested more information through their groups and many have reported a greater variety of foods is being used, especially fruits and vegetables.

At the time of the report by the County Council (July 8, 1944) they had thirty-one requests from groups for engagements starting in September.